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PHL 102.01: Introduction to Existentialism

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Existentialism

Tuesday/Thursday, 11:10-12:30, HS 207

This course will introduce you to some central themes and figures of what has come to be known as “existentialism.” Against the backdrop of the rise of science, the industrialization of modern society and the Enlightenment’s celebration of reason, a number of nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophers became increasingly dissatisfied with the manner in which philosophy had come to be practiced and the way that it was written. Philosophy seemed too impersonal, too rationalistic, and too much in awe of science. To attend to the human situation and to address the challenges of living an authentic human life in a world seemingly stripped of all external sources of meaning and value (a world in which Nietzsche famously declared that “God is dead”), something else was needed: new ways of writing philosophy, a rethinking of the significance of reason and its relation to the emotions, and a new emphasis on the concrete individual human being and the different modes in which the individual exists in the world. Over the course of the semester, we will critically examine the writings of several of these philosophers (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Camus, and Sartre) and try to arrive at a more general assessment of this philosophical approach.

Course Requirements

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|-------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Attendance/Participation/Quizzes | 10% |
| 2. Take-home Midterm | 35% |
| 3. Final Exam | 55% |

Readings

The following 4 books are required reading and can be purchased at the UM bookstore; they are also on two hour reserve in Mansfield Library.

1. Camus, *The Stranger*, trans. Arnold (ISBN: 978-0-67972-020-1)
2. Guignon and Pereboom, ed., *Existentialism: Basic Writings* (ISBN: 978-0-87220-595-6)
3. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Clark and Swensen (ISBN: 978-0-87220-283-2)
4. Sartre, *No Exit and Three Other Plays*, trans. Gilbert and Abel (ISBN: 978-0-67972-516-9)

In addition to the four books listed above, there is a Course Packet of additional required readings that you can purchase through Campus Quick Copy.

5. Course Packet

To obtain your Course Packet, follow these steps:

1. From a Campus Quick Copy computer, go to the course Moodle site (for information on accessing Moodle, see below). There you will find a PDF document labeled "Course Packet." Double click on this file (it may open within your browser or within Adobe Acrobat).
2. Under the "File" category, select "Print." When the printer window opens, do not immediately click "Print." First, click the "Properties" button; then click the "Finishing" tab. Check the "2-sided Printing" box and select the second icon (which shows the paper being flipped on the shorter edge). Then click "Okay." This will ensure that pages are printed double-sided and in a form appropriate for portrait binding (the longer edge).
3. Now click "Print."
4. Finally, ask Campus Quick Copy to bind your Course Packet along the longer edge (portrait binding).

The Course Packet contains the following additional required readings:

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, "Nihilism," excerpt from *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (Random House, 1967), pp. 7-15.
2. Woody Allen, "On *Crimes and Misdemeanors*" (excerpts), in *Woody Allen on Woody Allen*, ed. Stig Björkman (Grove Press, 1993), pp. 208-209; 212-213; 216-226.
3. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age* (excerpts), trans. A. Dru (Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 35-43; 47-51.
4. Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Vol. 1 (excerpts), trans. A. Hannay (Penguin, 1992), pp. 27-32; 34-37; 42-54; 56-57; 226-240.
5. Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Vol. 2 (excerpts), trans. A. Hannay (Penguin, 1992), pp. 383; 477-479; 482-487; 490; 492; 516-517; 520; 549-553.
6. Søren Kierkegaard, "On *Either/Or*," *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. H. Hong and E. Hong (Princeton, 1992), pp. 252-254.
7. Genesis 16-23:19, in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. H. May and B. Metzger (Oxford, 1977), pp. 18-26.
8. Robin Wood, "On *Vertigo*," in R. Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, rev. ed. (Columbia U. Press, 2002), pp. 108-130.
9. Immanuel Kant, "Abraham and the Moral Law," in *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. and ed. A. Wood and G. Giovanni (Cambridge, 1996), p. 283.
10. Søren Kierkegaard, "On *Fear and Trembling*," *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. H. Hong and E. Hong (Princeton, 1992), pp. 257-259; 261-262; 266-269.
11. Thomas Nagel, "The Absurd" (1971), in T. Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 11-23.
12. Albert Camus, Preface to *The Stranger*, in A. Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, ed. P. Thody (Knopf, 1968), pp. 335-337.
13. Charles Taylor, "Responsibility for Self" (1976), in G. Watson, ed., *Free Will* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 111-126.
14. George Wilson, "Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause*," in G. Wilson, *Narration in Light* (Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1986), pp. 166-190.

Films

Screenings will be held at **5:10 p.m., ED 214**. These films are also on four-hour reserve in Mansfield Library.

1. *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (Allen, 1989); Wednesday, February 6 (104 min).
2. *Vertigo* (Hitchcock, 1958); Tuesday, February 26 (128 min).
3. *Groundhog Day* (Ramis, 1993); Tuesday, March 26 (101 min).
4. *Rebel Without a Cause* (Ray, 1955); Tuesday, April 30 (111 min).

Moodle

This course has a Moodle page (<http://umonline.umt.edu>). For more information on how to access Moodle, go to <http://umonline.umt.edu/Moodle%20Tip%20Sheets/tipsheetandvideostudents.aspx>.

Email

Any email that I send to the class will be sent to your university email address via Moodle. If you use another email address (such as Gmail or Yahoo), please forward your university email to this other account. For directions on how to do this see http://umt.custhelp.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/820.

Accommodation for Disabilities

Whenever possible, and in accordance with civil rights laws, the University of Montana will attempt to provide reasonable modifications to courses for students with disabilities who request and require them. Please feel free to set up a time with me to discuss any modifications to this course you may require. For more information, contact Disability Services for Students, located in the Lommasson Center, room 154 (<http://life.umt.edu/dss/>).

Attendance, Participation, Class Etiquette

Your attendance and participation are crucial for the success of this class and will play a significant role in determining whether or not our time together proves to be intellectually challenging and fulfilling. As many of you probably know, it is a university requirement that you attend all class meetings for courses in which you are enrolled (<http://www.umt.edu/catalog/acad/acadpolicy/default.html#attendance>). In my experience, students also get the most out of those classes that they regularly attend. In this course I will take attendance. Everyone may miss three classes, no questions asked (and no justifications/explanations required). After that, each absence will reduce your attendance/participation grade by 10% (that is, 1% of your final grade).

As a courtesy to me and to your fellow classmates, during class please do not (1) talk to your nearby classmate while I or others are speaking; (2) peruse other reading materials (such as newspapers, crossword puzzles, etc.) or play computer games; or (3) use your cell phone. Cell phones should be turned off or placed on vibrate—and should not be taken out during class. Given that we will be meeting over the lunch hour, you are welcome to bring things to eat and drink—please dispose of any wrappers, uneaten food, etc. and try not to eat items that are noisy (such as potato chips, crunchy apples, etc.). If you know that you will have to leave class early, please sit near an exit so you can minimize how disruptive this will be for others.

The Art of Reading

Reading, like writing, is an art that can only be acquired through extensive and intensive practice. In general, you should plan to read each assignment for this course two times before you come to class: (i) read it through once to get a sense of the overall shape of the discussion and what the chief issues and questions seem to be; (ii) read it a second time, reading more slowly and with an eye to how the different parts hang together. As Thoreau put it, “To read well, that is, to read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise, and one that will task the reader more than any exercise which the customs of the day esteem. It requires a training such as the athletes underwent, the steady intention almost of the whole life to this object. Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written. [...] [T]his only is reading, in a high sense, not that which lulls us as a luxury and suffers the nobler faculties to sleep the while, but what we have to stand on tip-toe to read and devote our most alert and wakeful hours to” (“Reading,” *Walden*).

Plagiarism/Academic Dishonesty

I will not tolerate cheating or plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty in this course. In addition to being a violation of the University of Montana Student Conduct Code (http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php), cheating and plagiarizing also harm your fellow students by giving you an unfair advantage, and harm you since you thereby fail to take yourself seriously. While I think it is pretty self-evident what cheating is, people are not always clear about what plagiarism is. To start, plagiarism can be defined as a form of intellectual stealing and cheating. The Latin root means “to kidnap” and vividly captures what is at stake: when you plagiarize you steal someone else’s intellectual child and pretend that you are its true parent. Specific examples of plagiarism include: (i) incorporating material from somewhere else (a book, an article, a website, an encyclopedia entry) without properly documenting this (and thereby giving the true author credit for her or his work); (ii) handing in work that you did not do (e.g., by purchasing a paper on the Internet or downloading text that you simply insert into your own paper or borrowing a paper that another student wrote). In general, the first instance of cheating or plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade (“F”) for the course. Any instance of cheating or plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty is also subject to University sanction. If you have any questions about whether or not something might constitute plagiarism, please feel free to contact me; see also <http://www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/plagiarism>.

Schedule of Readings and Written Assignments

(Subject to change with advance notice)

CP= Course Packet

1. Introduction to Existentialism

Week 1

Tue 1/29 Class Overview

Thur 1/31 What is Existentialism?

“The Legacy of Existentialism” (Guignon and Pereboom, pp. xiii-xxxviii)

Week 2

Tue 2/5 Nihilism

Nietzsche, “Nihilism” (CP #1)

Wed 2/6 Film Screening: *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (5:10 p.m., ED 214)

Thur 2/7 Discuss *Crimes and Misdemeanors*

Allen, “On *Crimes and Misdemeanors*” (CP #2)

2. Kierkegaard

Week 3

Tue 2/12 An Age of Reflection

Kierkegaard, *The Present Age* (CP #3)

Thur 2/14 The Aesthetic Life: Attempting to Overcome Melancholy and Boredom

Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Vol. 1 (CP #4)

Week 4

Tue 2/19 The Ethical Life: Freedom and the Art of Choosing (to be) Oneself

Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Vol. 2 (CP #5)

Kierkegaard, “On *Either/Or*” (CP #6)

Thur 2/21 The Religious Life: Abraham, Father of Faith

Genesis 16-23:19 (CP #7)

Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Preface; A Panegyric Upon Abraham (Guignon and Pereboom, pp. 26-35)

Week 5

Tue 2/26 Knights of Infinite Resignation and Faith
Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Problemata: Preliminary Expectoration (Guignon and Pereboom, pp. 35-55)

Tue 2/26 Film Screening: *Vertigo* (5:10 p.m., ED 214)

Thur 2/28 Discuss *Vertigo*
Wood, "On *Vertigo*" (CP #8)

Week 6

Tue 3/5 The Tragic Hero vs. The Knight of Faith: Living in Opposition to the Universal
Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Problem I; Problem II (Guignon and Pereboom, pp. 55-77)
Kant, "Abraham and the Moral Law" (CP #9)
Kierkegaard, "On *Fear and Trembling*" (CP #10)

Thur 3/7 Review
Take-home Midterm Handed Out

3. Nietzsche

Week 7

Tue 3/12 The Death of God
Introduction to Nietzsche (Guignon and Pereboom, pp. 93; 96-104)
Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Preface and §§1, 58, 108-109, 113, 116-118, 120, 125, 270, 283, 290, 335 (Guignon and Pereboom, pp. 123-134; 137-147)

Take-home Midterm Due

Thur 3/14 Eternal Recurrence
Introduction to Nietzsche (Guignon and Pereboom, pp. 104-114)
Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §§341, 343, 345-347, 353, 377, 382-383 (Guignon and Pereboom, pp. 147-149; 151-155; 157-158; 167-171)

Week 8

Tue 3/19 Noble Morality vs. Slave Morality
Clark, Introduction to *On the Genealogy of Morality* (pp. vii-xxxi)
Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Preface; First Treatise (pp. 1-33)

Thur 3/21 Punishment, Guilt and the Inner Life
Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, First Treatise (continued)
Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Second Treatise (pp. 35-66)

Week 9

Tue 3/26 The Sovereign Individual
Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Second Treatise (continued)

Tue 3/26 Film Screening: *Groundhog Day* (5:10 p.m., ED 214)

Thur 3/28 Discuss *Groundhog Day*

Week 10 **No Class (Spring Break)**

4. Camus

Week 11

Tue 4/9 A World Without Meaning
Camus, *The Stranger*, Part One (pp. 3-59)

Thur 4/11 Prison and Freedom
Camus, *The Stranger*, Part Two (pp. 63-123)

Week 12

Tue 4/16 The Absurd
Nagel, "The Absurd" (CP #11)
Camus, Preface to *The Stranger* (CP #12)
Camus, *The Stranger*, Part Two, Chapter V (reread; pp. 108-123)

5. Sartre

Thur 4/18 Existence Precedes Essence
Introduction to Sartre, §1 (Guignon and Pereboom, pp. 255-259)
Sartre, "The Humanism of Existentialism" (Guignon and Pereboom, pp. 290-308)

Week 13

Tue 4/23 Freedom and Responsibility
Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, §8 (Guignon and Pereboom, pp. 352-355)
Taylor, "Responsibility for Self" (CP #13)

Thur 4/25 Bad Faith
Introduction to Sartre, §§3-4 (Guignon and Pereboom, pp. 269-272)
Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, §§4-5 (Guignon and Pereboom, pp. 328-344)

Week 14

Tue 4/30 *The Flies* (Act 1 and Act 2, Scene 1)
Sartre, *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (pp. 49-93)

Tue 4/30 Film Screening: *Rebel Without a Cause* (5:10 p.m., ED 214)

Thur 5/2 Discuss *Rebel Without a Cause*
Wilson, "Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause*" (CP #14)

Week 15

Tue 5/7 *The Flies* (Act 2, Scene 2 and Act 3)
Sartre, *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (pp. 93-124)

Thur 5/9 Conclusion

Week 16

Tue 5/14 **Final Exam (8:00-10:00 a.m., HS 207)**